

## **UPDATE ON POSSIBLE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION DURING SOUTH KITSAP SCHOOL DISTRICT 'ZOOM' BOARD MEETINGS**



### **GOOD NEWS!**

**We might t be allowed to give public comments during South Kitsap School District Board meeting soon!**

Good news, maybe. We found out that SKSD Board 'might' permit public comment periods at next Zoom board meeting on April 29th 5:00. CSSKS member was given this information via e-mail exchange with SKSD Superintendent Tim Winter.

It's notable that Washington State is not the only State that is banning public comments during school district board meetings. Here's how a school district in South Carolina has eliminated public comments at school board meetings.

**The S.C. School Board Association recommended that districts eliminate public participation during COVID-19 crisis.**



## **South Carolina School District:**

Here is a quote: " The (SCSBA South Carolina School Board Association) advised that districts temporarily eliminate public comment during the state of emergency. Further stating: "Remember, the board is not required by law to hold a public comment period during board meetings, with the exception of public hearings, which would include budget hearings," SCSBA officials said in an email.

In essence, this South Carolina School District voted on two proposals that shifted power and control away from the public and also their elected school board officials during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this case it was a Chairman and a Superintendent that voted to also remove power from the Board Members. Wonder if our Board members would like that being forced upon them?

But all is not well and some board members of district don't like it. Board member Ken Loveless said on Facebook he believes suspending public comment is "dangerous" — especially considering district offices are closed and there is no one to take phone calls.

Board member Loveless also said it's a "shame" the board is only giving taxpayers one avenue — private email —to raise concerns about public matters

### **An unnamed community activist stated:**

"Constituents are worried that the suspension was passed in a move to silence the voices of the public". "I feel this is a way that the board is shutting down the public and it's a real misuse of power by them during an unprecedented crisis". Several districts residents, who voiced their concerns on Facebook, saw the move as a "power grab" in the midst of an ongoing public health crisis.

### **There are certainly some similarities here.**

Interesting that in South Carolina, power was also being taken away from school board members. In our case here in SKSD, the District Superintendent (by fiat essentially) and enacted by Emergency Resolution 1320 that was adopted just last week now has essentially unlimited authority to make district decisions without prior board approval. Just a different way of cutting out the need for school board members to act or take responsibility some might say.

### **Here is the link to the full South Carolina story:**

<https://www.fitsnews.com/2020/04/09/sc-school-district-removes-power-from-board-members-suspends-public-comment-in-covid-19-crisis/>